

Notes for Next Sunday

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isaiah 50:4-10). This is the third of the four servant songs. The first verse of this chapter identified the speaker as “the Lord.” But now someone else speaks, because he announces His relationship to “the Sovereign Lord.” The Hebrew mind assumed that everyone reading the passage would understand that the speaker had changed. We consider the speaker to be the Servant of the Lord, whom we have met before. The Lord contrasts His Servant’s humility and obedience with Israel’s rebelliousness. The Servant’s obedience and suffering atoned for your sins and the sins of all the world. Walk in the light of His Word. In Him there is no disgrace.

Epistle (James 3:1-12). There are only two ways to live: by the “wisdom” of the world or by God’s wisdom. James condemns the worldly pattern of selfishness, deception, hurtful words, and other evil behaviors. Christians, too, struggle with such sins and are even tempted to present themselves as holier than others. How different is the wisdom of God! He has purified us in Christ and freed us from the stain of the world. We now walk in the works He has prepared for us to do.

Gospel (Mark 9:14-29). Jesus descends from the transfiguration and meets a defiant demon, an anxious father, an astonished crowd, and despairing disciples. Despair threatens to overwhelm our faith too by pointing out how we fail to change or improve, suggesting that God neither cares for us nor has power to help. However, Jesus does not linger in the glory of the transfiguration, but graciously descends to a world of despair and doubt so that He might deliver us.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 50:4-10

⁴The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. ⁵The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. ⁶I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. ⁷Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. ⁸He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! ⁹It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up. ¹⁰Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.

50:4 instructed tongue. Trained tongue, a well-taught tongue. Christ did nothing of Himself; only as the Father had taught Him, so He spoke. (PC)

50:4 word that sustains the weary. Jesus’ words have the power to convert “weary” souls. His very words are sheer “spirit and life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

50:4 wakens my ear. While rebellious Israel turned a deaf ear to God, the Servant would “speak just as the Father taught” Him (Jn 8:27–29). Therefore, a word from Him sufficed to sustain the weary. (TLSB)

50:5 I have not drawn back. “I do not turn back to Egypt and become unbelieving, but I confess the Word with the mouth as well as in deed. I sing the praises of the power and might of that seemingly powerless and foolish Word.” (Luther)

50:6 my back to those who beat me. This implied that a whipping would take place. Beatings happened to criminals. This and what follows is the “way of the cross.” Jesus freely takes that path. (Luther)

50:6 pulled out my beard. This detail of Jesus’ appearance, commonly depicted by artists, occurs only here. Pulling out of a beard showed contempt and disrespect for the person. (TLSB)

50:6 mocking and spitting. To show hatred (Job 30:10) or to insult or disgrace. This treatment of the servant anticipates his ultimate suffering. (CSB)

50:7 Sovereign Lord. For the third time (50:4-5), the Servant states that the Lord Yahweh assists him in his mission. (CC)

50:7 not be disgraced ... put to shame. Even death is not a disgrace for the Servant, who places His life in the Lord’s hands. (TLSB)

50:7 my face like flint. Like the prophets, the servant will endure with great determination. Cf. Lk 9:51, where Jesus “resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (lit. “resolutely set his face to go to Jerusalem”). (CSB)

50:8 bring charges. Because Christ was sinless, he also nullifies the charges brought against any who believe in him. (CSB)

50:9 wear out like a garment; the moths. The Servant’s enemies will be as fragile and vulnerable as cloth, which even a tiny moth can destroy. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – James 3:1-12

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ²We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. ³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ¹¹Can both fresh water and salt^a water flow from the same spring? ¹²My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

3:1 teachers. Office in the Early Church. Its work, along with that of apostles and prophets, was eventually carried out by pastors. Nevertheless, these warnings apply to all who claim to teach. (TLSB)

3:1 judged more strictly. Because false teaching can destroy the faith of those being taught. Both a stricter standard of judgment and a harsher punishment. (TLSB)

3:5 fire by a small spark. Under control, a spark can make a small fire to warm cold travelers and cook their food. Out of control, a spark can cause a conflagration that can reduce thousands of acres of mighty trees to blackened, smoking stumps. (PBC)

3:6 corrupts the whole body. James thinks it urgent that people learn to control their mouths, not only to avoid hurting other people emotionally and spiritually. But an uncontrolled tongue can also turn on the uncontrolled talker, corrupting the whole person, poisoning his or her mind, and plunging the body into the dangers of the fires of hell. (PBC)

3:8 no man can tame the tongue. The tongue does not operate itself. What James is really getting at is that it is the brain that regulates the tongue. Here is another example of real faith for real life – people who claim to be believers must not let their mouths get out control. Real faith in the Savior welcomes the power of the Spirit to bite back lies, sarcasm, ridicule, gossip, evil suggestions, and praise for evil deeds. Real faith uses the Spirit’s real power to build up other people, speak the truth, compliment, forgive, and comfort. Real faith also knows when to command the tongue to be silent. (PBC)

3:9 in God’s likeness. All people deserve respect because they are made in the image of God. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Mark 9:14-29

¹⁴When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ¹⁶“What are you arguing with them about?” he asked. ¹⁷A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” ¹⁹“O unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” ²⁰So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. ²¹Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. ²²“It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” ²³“If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.” ²⁴Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” ²⁵When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” ²⁶The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” ²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. ²⁸After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” ²⁹He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

9:14 the other disciples. The nine besides Peter, James and John. (CSB)

9:14 arguing with them. As soon as Jesus came within speaking distance, He inquired about the cause of the disturbance. He asked not only the scribes, but all of them, What is all this disputing about? The scribes had begun the quarrel, and the people had probably taken sides, some with the scribes, some with the apostles. At the approach of Jesus the excitement subsided, both parties being evidently somewhat abashed by His presence. (Kretzmann)

9:17 a spirit that makes him mute. His condition resembled an epileptic seizure, causing recurring convulsions and loss of consciousness, but was caused by demon possession. (TLSB)

9:19 oh unbelieving generation. This does not necessarily mean “without saving faith.” The father did have faith. So did the disciples. But both **also** struggled with unbelief. On the other hand, we should also understand that the disciples’ failure to cast out the demon was not because their faith was not strong enough. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

9:19 how long shall I stay with you? He was now well into the third year of instructing His disciples and thus wondered out loud when they would ever learn. How much longer would it take? (PBC)

9:23 If you can? ... Everything is possible for him who believes. The question was not whether Jesus had the power to heal the boy but whether the father had faith to believe it. A person who truly believes will set no limits on what God can do. (CSB)

9:24 I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief! Since faith is never perfect, belief and unbelief are often mixed. (CSB)

9:25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. As much as possible, Jesus wanted to avoid further publicity. (CSB)

9:29 only by prayer. † The disciples apparently had taken for granted the power given to them or had come to believe that it was inherent in them. Lack of prayer indicated they had forgotten that their power over the demonic spirits was from Jesus. Faith works through prayer. (CSB)